THE girl had come to Malaya to live with her brother. She told Gilbert so, soon after the launch started up-river. One doesn't stand on ceremony when the boat holds but one other white and three natives. Gilbert had moved a bag for her, she had thanked him, and so they had talked.

Hopkins, the brother, Gilbert knew slightly. He was a shoe-string rubber planter whose small place was a day's journey above Kuala Bharu where the launch was taking them.

Gilbert was conscious of a shock when she told him. He fumbled for something to say, and only succeeded in repeating:

"Your brother?"

She nodded, smiled, said: "Yes."

Gilbert knew by the soft light in her eyes that she was very fond of this brother of hers. That made him feel even worse—for John Hopkins had been dead four weeks. He sat silent under the knowledge that he possessed.

In a moment she said: "He is all I have now. I'll be glad to see him again."

The motor of the launch put-putted rhythmically. The prow met the slow current of the river and the water, heavily silted from the tin washings up country, divided with soft gurgles and slipped by steadily. From the dark, somber-green jungle on the right bank a hornbill flapped clumsily, saw them and wheeled back with harsh, discordant cries.

Gilbert studied her covertly. Rosy cheeks such as only the raw English climate could color; brown hair worn long, pleasing features, and a cool direct gaze. That gaze decided Gilbert. She would have sense and strength, and she would have to know soon, anyway.

Yet, though determined to break the cruel news to her, he still groped for a suitable way to bring it out.

"A harsh land, this, at times," he said after a moment.

She gazed across the reddish-brown water at the right bank, where the thick, tangled jungle came down to meet the water.

"It looks—well, mysterious," she said thoughtfully.

"You can never tell what it's going to do," Gilbert said desperately.

She looked at him.

"How do you mean?"

"It is hard on humans. They die easily."

Tin in the Jungle

There's Love and Danger and Death in this Novelette of Malaya

By T. T. FLYNN

Something in Gilbert's tone got across to her. She looked at him steadily, then spoke slowly, "There haven't been any deaths here, recently, have there?"

Gilbert could not meet her eyes.

"One," he answered wretchedly. "About four weeks ago."

Swift dread leaped into her face.

"What was—his name?"

Gilbert looked at her with compassion. "A rubber planter," he replied. "A chap by the name of—Hopkins."

Her right fist suddenly clenched until the nails bit into the palm and the knuckles showed white against the smooth skin. The color drained from her face and her eyelids closed. Her smooth throat fluttered as she swallowed the lump that Gilbert knew was pushing up and choking her.

In that long, silent moment when she fought with her emotions, admiration was born in Gilbert's breast. No weakling, this sister of the dead Hopkins, a girl that a man could take pride in. The two tears that finally forced their way between her closed lids made Gilbert think the more of her. She had loved her brother. He looked out over the river, that she might be alone with her grief.

PRESENTLY she wiped her eyes and spoke low. "Thank you for telling me. I know it must have been hard for you."

"I want you to know," Gilbert said earnestly, "that you can call on me for anything. The missionary's wife in Kuala Bharu will tell you that I can be trusted."

"Thank you."

After a moment she said, "How did John die?"

"Snake. A hamadryad, a king cobra, got into his room in the night. They are nasty beggars. Go after you without provocation. This one hid under his bed. When he stepped out in the morning it got him deep, on the bare ankle, twice."

"Did he suffer much?" she asked with an effort.

"No," Gilbert said kindly. "I heard all about it. He had a visitor at the time—a Portuguese named Vega. Vega heard him cry out and got to him in a few seconds. Hopkins had killed the cobra with a chair and was searching for a knife to slash the wound. It took a little time to find one—and cobra venom acts fast, you know. It was all over quickly."

She had tensed when Gilbert mentioned the Portuguese, Vega.

"What was that man doing there?" she asked abruptly.

"Stopped in for a visit I guess. He and his American partner, Jacobs, backed your brother with a good bit of money when rubber slumped. I guess your brother couldn't help putting him up when he came around. Vega seemed pretty upset by the affair."

"Why did you say John couldn't help putting him up when he came around?"

Gilbert shrugged. "I'll not be running men down behind their backs when I say that they don't stand very high with the white people in this part of the peninsula. Your brother went to him as a last hope, when he stood in danger of losing his land. They let him have the money he needed, and, I guess, took their pound of flesh, in writing, for it. They have that reputation, you know. For that reason Hopkins had to stand them around, I suppose. One doesn't snub men who might be able to ruin one some day."

She nodded. A silence fell between them.

Presently she asked: "Where is this man, Vega?"

"He and his partner have the place," Gilbert said unwillingly. "They produced a paper your brother had signed. One clause in it was to the effect that in the event of your brother's death, if Vega was not repaid, the land was to go to Vega at once, to safeguard the money he had loaned."

"His loan did not nearly cover the value of the land," she burst out. "I know that."

"One of the items in the 'pound of flesh,' I guess. Your brother probably thought little of that clause. I'm sure he didn't expect to die. We never do, until it is too late."

"These men were not paid?"

"No, there was no record of it. I'm afraid there is nothing you can do about the matter. The papers were quite regular and they followed the law."

There were no more questions. She stared up-river with a fixed gaze. Her face, drained of blood, had looked wan; now it seemed to Gilbert that her lips set and her features gradually took on a stony look. That was the word for it, stony. She had strength, and she had come to a decision and set her will inflexibly to it.

The sight of her sitting there, stony-faced, her trouble locked tight in her breast, touched Gilbert deeply. He wondered if she had come out on her last money, if she had enough to take her back, or keep her until she caught her bearings. His concern finally drove him to say, stumblingly,

"Miss Hopkins—I—are you—confound it, how does this leave you?"

"Alone," she said flatly.

"I mean—are you all right? Will you need any money to go back out? The missionary's wife will tell you that I am perfectly honorable. I'd like to help, if you need it, and will let me."

She smiled slightly at his confusion.

"That is nice of you. But, just at present, I am not going out."

"You will be welcome in Kuala Bharu, of course," Gilbert assured her hastily.

"I don't expect to stay there," she said calmly. "I am going on up-river to my brother's plantation."

Gilbert looked at her in amazement.

"I say," he protested. "You really can't, you know. Vega and Jacobs are there alone. They and a few of their native men. They're a cut-throat lot, taken all together. It's not really safe, even if we do have law at Singapore, and over most of the peninsula."

"I am sure I shall be all right."

IN HIS mind Gilbert had already assumed a protecting attitude toward her. It irritated him that she should disregard his warnings. That he was right only made it worse.

"You really mustn't think of it," he insisted. "The missionary's wife will tell you the same as I."

She replied in a voice as set as the stony look on her face: "Nevertheless, I am going. I have a reason. I shall remember your warning and watch the men closely."

Gilbert wanted to laugh angrily. A good girl fresh from the safety of England, trying to match wits with Jacobs and the fat, oily-skinned, gross, Vega—men old in the country, skilled in every form of trickery, with hearts as black as a moonless tropic night and brains filled with cunning. It was pitiful, if one hadn't begun to feel as Gilbert had. The very thought of her fresh youth coming close to the pig-eyed Portuguese and his evil little partner was revolting.

"You can't go there!" he burst out. "I tell you it's impossible!"

"Why is it?" she asked calmly.

"I've told you—neither man is fit to be met in Kuala Bharu—let alone a whole day's journey up-river. You don't know what that distance means."

"Just what does it mean?"

"It means you are ten hours away from any white person. Law has ceased to be for you. There is just you—and them. If you knew them as I do that would be enough. I tell you, it is impossible!" Gilbert had become so earnest that his voice had risen. The two Malay boys in the bow looked around at them.

Her face did not alter.

"I am sorry to worry you," she declared. "But—my mind is made up. Please forget about me."

"I cannot forbid you—if you insist," Gilbert said stiffly.

She caught the coolness in his voice, leaned forward quickly, and said: "Perhaps you are right—but I am going. Can't we remain friends in spite of that?"

Gilbert couldn't hold his irritation. "Of course, I shall feel honored if you will permit it," he said earnestly.

The faintest trace of color returned to her cheeks. She smiled wanly and, on that basis, they covered the rest of the day's journey to Kuala Bharu.

It was not much of a place. There two rivers came together and made one larger stream. On the right bank stood the missionary's neat compound, shaded by great cassias. A little farther along was the native kampong with its clustered huts thatched with leaves of the nipa-palm, and the more substantial buildings of the two Chinese traders.

Mary Hopkins was welcomed heartily by the missionary and his wife. Strangers were infrequent. Those just out with all the latest news and gossip were treasured.

It was pathetic, the questions they asked about home, the way they hung on her words. They got the Singapore papers of course, and even London papers and magazines, but somehow it was not like direct living news.

They talked all evening, the missionary, his wife, faded by years in the tropics, Mary Hopkins, and Gilbert, who was a district engineer. When the news from home ran low and conversation shifted to Malayan affairs, Gilbert told of Mary Hopkins' determination to go up-river to her brother's plantation.

In the moment's silence that fell, the chickchack on the ceiling gave its strangely human cry. The missionary and his wife looked at her with concern.

"I—ah, I really wouldn't do it," the missionary said after a moment.

"But my mind is made up," Mary Hopkins replied, and her features, which had relaxed somewhat, shifted back into the stony look.

A glance passed between the good missionary and his wife. That lady nodded slightly when Mary looked the other way, and by that nod promised to do her best when she had the girl alone.

Later, before they retired, she did. But, when she had said her say, Mary Hopkins only reiterated her intention. And when the missionary lady offered to make the trip also, Mary thanked her and stated that she wished to go alone.

There was nothing to do but let her have her own way.

Gilbert admitted it moodily the next morning, when the missionary's wife told him of her failure.

"I'd go with her, wanted or not, if I didn't have to dash back to the coast and meet two men who are stopping in from Singapore to see me!" he burst out. "Why —why does she have to do this foolish thing?"

Years had given the little faded missionary lady wisdom. She read in Gilbert, who was only thirty-two, what he himself did not know. And sighed inwardly for this problem that was enveloping the two young people.

"There is great sorrow in her heart," she told him. "And more. I do not pretend to know what it is, but it shows in her face and every tone of her voice when she speaks of going up-river. She will go and I am sure the good God will guide her steps safely. He does, you know, when one is good and innocent, as she is."

"The devil walks with Vega and Jacobs," Gilbert declared heatedly. "Even the Bible admits that he sometimes wins!"

"It is in God's hands."

Gilbert was not comforted or reassured. A sudden thought sent him in search of Mary Hopkins. He found her on the river bank, looking at the missionary's launch, in

which it had been decided she would make the trip next day.

"Look here," Gilbert said directly. "You know how I feel about all this. I am forced to go down-river again tomorrow. Will you take my personal boy, Ali? He's been with me for three years, and I trust him implicitly."

"The one who steered your launch yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I don't like to take your man away from you."

"I insist," Gilbert said firmly.

She yielded with a slight smile.

"Very well—if you insist."

Gilbert stood on the rickety landing next morning with the missionary and his wife and watched the missionary's launch swerve out into the river, plow across the muddy waters brought down from the tin mines by the right fork, and enter the clearer waters of the smaller left fork. And not even the fact that the trusted Ali was with Mary Hopkins, and the launch was manned by three Christian mission boys, lightened the heaviness of his spirit.

DURING the long hours of that day Mary Hopkins realized more fully what ten hours up-river meant. Mile after solitary mile of somber, brooding jungle-clad banks slipped slowly astern. The river twisted in and out until all sense of direction was lost. There were bars, shallows, and swift places. And always the walls of green on each side. They saw snakes swimming in the water, monster crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks, birds flapping overhead, and once in a while, when the channel cut close to the bank, they would catch sight of some animal fading back to safety. But in all the day they saw no sign of a white man and very few of natives. The growing thought that, if she should need help, the long deserted miles would bar it away, was disquieting. But she put that behind her and resolutely set her mind on what lay ahead.

They came to the plantation in the late afternoon. On the left bank of the river the tangled jungle growth gave way to even rows of young rubber trees that stretched back out of sight. Farther on there was a small landing. Back of it a clearing had been left among the rows of rubber trees. In it was a small wooden bungalow thatched with nipa-palm leaves. Back of that the smoke-house, store-house, the long thatched coolie-line, where the contract Tamil labor lived, and several other small buildings.

It brought a lump into Mary Hopkins's throat, this work that her brother had accomplished at a cost which she alone knew. But she had little time for such thoughts. From the spacious veranda in front of the bungalow a figure issued, and came heavily down to the landing to meet the launch.

Even before she saw the features, the full-fleshed form filled her with dislike. And when the launch slid in closer and the pulpy, oily-skinned features became visible, the feeling heightened. The Portuguese stared at the launch with little beady eyes. And when he saw that it held but one pretty white girl besides the native crew, they glittered with awakened interest.

He was on the landing, his sun hat of grey felt in his hand, his oily features creased in a smile of welcome, when the launch floated near enough for one of the mission boys to leap ashore with a painter and bring it alongside.

Mary Hopkins stepped out on the landing.

Vega bowed low.

"I do not know what brings this good fortune to our door," he said in accented English. "But I am content. Senhora, I, Manuel Vega, am at your service."

Mary Hopkins gazed into his face.

"I am the sister of John Hopkins," she said calmly.

For a fleeting brace of seconds the smile on the pulpy features set; the flesh about beady eyes crinkled in astonishment. Then Vega, master of himself once more, bowed low again.

"So happy to know you," he exclaimed. And straightening up and shooting a sharp look at her! "I did not know that John Hopkins had a sister."

"Doubtless there are many things you are not aware of," Mary Hopkins replied coolly.

Vega digested that for a moment, his little eyes boring into her. Then he shrugged and spread his hands out, palms upward, and showed none-too-clean teeth in a smile.

"Doubtless," he agreed suavely. "You have, perhaps, come to tell me some of them?"

"Perhaps," she agreed pleasantly, and

turned to the launch and ordered—"Ali, put my bags out."

Vega's eyes widened, and then as they took in the girl's trim figure they narrowed and flamed. He swallowed and passed his tongue over his thick lips. When she turned he was leering.

"You have come to stay with my partner and me?"

"I have come to pay my brother's plantation a visit," she said coldly. "Have you any objections?"

"I? Ah, senhorita, a thousand times no! To have you here is, is a pleasure what I have not had for long time. My partner feels same way I am sure. Welcome, many times welcome." Vega made his exaggerated bow once again.

Ali, lithe, muscular, clad in an old pair of Gilbert's whites, cut off to make shorts, and a short-sleeved white shirt, with a keen wavy-bladed Malay kris thrust through his front belt, stood at her elbow with the two bags at his feet. The mission boys lounged behind him.

Vega stared at Ali.

"That is Senhor Gilbert's boy, not?" he asked.

"Yes," Mary Hopkins agreed. "Mr. Gilbert lent him to me."

Vega leered.

"Senhor Gilbert is always so, so thoughtful," he purred.

Mary flushed.

"If you will tell Ali where to take my bags, and the other boys where they can stay for the night, I shall be grateful."

"Of course! Ten thousand pardons! If you will have seat on the veranda I will attend to everything."

She walked up the path which led to the thatched bungalow. Vega gave Ali and the mission boys orders and then hastened heavily after her.

"My partner, Jacobs, is out shooting pigeons," he said expansively, stopping before her. "Unfortunate, not? While he is gone a paradise bird visits his home, if you will permit me poetry." He smiled widely.

"Indulge freely—if you have a poet's soul," Mary Hopkins retorted dryly, and transferred her gaze to the scene about the bungalow.

Vega caught her indifference, stopped smiling, stared at the side of her face for a moment and then shrugged slightly.

"Yes, not," he said. "I will now go and order tiffin prepared and see that your quarters are placed in order. Excuse, please."

She nodded, and did not even bother to follow his progress through the wide front door with her eyes.

VEGA and Jacobs were living in the bungalow. Vega had the Chinese houseboy carry most of their effects to one of the smaller buildings off to the side and turned the bungalow over to her. There, after she had had a chance to freshen up, a late tiffin of rice and curry, with sambals of chopped wild pineapple, grated cocoanut and mango chutney was served by a wizened Chinese cook who came and went like a shadow.

Vega had already eaten, but he sat across from her and sipped a glass of wine and talked blandly. Not many minutes passed before Mary Hopkins saw that the Portuguese was skillfully trying to draw out the reason for her visit. Over the dessert she told him, artlessly, as much of the truth as was necessary.

"I came out from England to live with John. His last letter said that he was in good health. He wanted me here with him. And then, on the way up to Kuala Bharu, Mr. Gilbert told me that John had died. It was a great shock. I decided to come the rest of the way and look at his plantation."

Vega had eyed her searchingly as she told it and a look of relief flitted across his face as he agreed: 'Yes, yes, you did quite right. It will be nice to take back memories of the place your brother once owned. Senhor Gilbert doubtless told you that title to the holdings had passed into new hands, not?"

"He did."

Vega drained his glass, set it down, and shook his head.

"Very sad; very unfortunate, everything," he stated. "My partner and I were desolated—but business is business, and we had to take over the management of the place and try to get our money out of it. Doubtless we shall lose as it is."

"Then you loaned John a great deal of money?"

"Large sums," Vega declared. "Rubber was down below the cost of production. Planters were going bankrupt everywhere—and Senhor Hopkins, your brother, was

desperate. He came to us, my partner Jacobs and I, and pleaded with tears in his eyes for a loan. We had little, but we shared with him, only asking that he sign papers to protect us against what the future brought. We were glad to help him. Friendship is a beautiful thing, Miss Hopkins, not?"

She put down the spoonful of gula malacca that was near her lips, as though it had suddenly lost its appeal for her.

"You were such good friends?" she asked.

Vega poured another glass of wine from the bottle that stood by his right elbow. He drained it and then said heavily: "It was a beautiful friendship, Miss Hopkins. My partner and I thought much of your brother—and he returned it."

She glanced at the gross face, marked with dissipation, and then looked away.

"The loan was not repaid?" she asked after a moment.

Vega shot her a look, shook his head, said quickly: "No—it fell due just after he, ah, passed away. He had asked us to extend it. We agreed to do so and I was here to see him about it. Before anything more could be done he, ah, was called to his Fathers. I felt it deeply."

"You still have his note then?"

"There was no note," Vega said smoothly. "He signed an agreement acknowledging receipt of the money and agreeing to certain conditions. The money was not repaid, the conditions had to be fulfilled. A matter of simple justice, not?"

"It would seem that way." Mary Hopkins pushed back her chair and stood up. Vega hastily followed. "You will sit on the veranda and take the air?" he asked. "My partner should come soon. Darkness will be on us quickly."

They went out on the veranda and took seats. Ali, Gilbert's trusted Malay, was squatting in front of the house in the shade of a large forest tree, which had been left standing when the jungle was cleared. He was gazing in their direction and Mary Hopkins realized that he had been looking through the front screening all the time she was inside with Vega. The thought somehow made her feel better.

They had been there but a few minutes when Jacobs came around the corner of the house. He was a small, dried-up little man with a sharp face, thin cruel lips, and high cheek bones across which the skin stretched tautly. He wore an old sun helmet, and was dressed in khaki shorts and shirt which were dark with sweat. At sight of Mary Hopkins, sitting by Vega, he scowled slightly, and came to the top of the steps staring at her.

Vega arose.

"Senhorita Hopkins, I have pleasure to present my partner, Sehnor Jacobs," he said grandly. "This, Jacobs, is sister of our good friend, John Hopkins."

For an instant Jacobs looked startled.

"Pleased to meet you," he said, and looked at Vega.

"Senhorita Hopkins came out to live with her brother," Vega explained. "She did not know all until she got to Kuala Bharu. She has come up to pay her brother's plantation short visit."

"Does she know it ain't her brother's any more?" Jacobs asked shortly.

Vega shrugged the crudeness away.

"Yes—it has all been explained."

Jacobs nodded, sat down on the top step, and lit a cigaret.

MARY HOPKINS had been studying him. At that point she questioned with interest—"Did you kill many pigeons, Mr. Jacobs?"

"Pigeons? What pigeons?" Jacobs raised his eyebrows and stared at her.

Vega said hastily: "I explained to Senhorita Hopkins that you were out shooting pigeons. Doubtless you left them with the cook, not?"

"Oh, sure, I left 'em with the Chink back in the kitchen. Got quite a mess."

"How nice. I am fond of birds. Will you have them for dinner?"

Vega glanced at her uncomfortably and Jacobs scowled again.

"We feed them to the coolies," he said bruskly. "They are probably in the coolie pot by now. These Chink cooks work fast."

"Oh. Well, perhaps you will shoot some for me another day."

Jacobs stood up abruptly.

"I'm a busy man," he replied shortly. "I won't have a chance to shoot again for some time. If you are fond of birds I'll see that the cook serves you plenty of chicken." He started for the front door.

"We have moved to the little house," Vega told him quickly. "All your things are there. Senhorita Hopkins shall have the best we can give her, not?"

Jacobs was obviously short tempered. He halted and his thin lips tightened.

"Certainly!" he spat out. "Anything! I'll trust you to see to that, Vega." He went back down the steps and disappeared around the side of the house.

"I don't believe Mr. Jacobs likes to have me here," Mary Hopkins said thoughtfully.

"But surely, yes," Vega declared heartily, and leaned closer to her. "You must not mind Jacobs. He was surprised to see you. He has his little ways—but underneath he is, is tender as maiden's heart—just like Manuel Vega. I am so, what you call it—soft, that I am foolish when beautiful young lady like you is around." He hitched his chair an inch or so closer.

Ali's sharp eyes took in the move. His right arm dropped carelessly on the handle of his keen kris, which projected across his stomach. But no move of his was needed. Mary Hopkins stood up.

"I am tired," she said. "I think I will go to my room and try to get some sleep."

Vega was disappointed.

"You will not stay and watch darkness fall?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you will have dinner with us, not?"

"I am sorry—but I think if I once get to sleep I shall stay that way until morning."

"Ah, I shall be desolated."

She asked: "I suppose my brother's trunk is still here, and his personal things?"

"Yes—they are in the storehouse."

"I would like to have them brought to my room."

"Anything what you desire I shall see is done," Vega said eagerly. He stood up. "I shall attend to it right away, Senhorita Hopkins. Vega, he is soft, I tell you."

"Thank you." She entered the house.

Vega stared at the door a minute, rolled his little piggish eyes, and then went heavily down the front steps and around the house.

Ali, still squatting under the tree, watched him go impassively. Then he stood up and moved to the foot of the front steps and squatted again, silent, watchful.

NIGHT fell soon after that. One moment the sun hovered over the line of jungle across the river. The next it dropped swiftly out of sight and quick darkness closed in. Frogs broke into voice up and down the river, insects began to drone through the air, fireflys winked out.

Two half-naked Tamils brought an air-tight tin trunk and a dispatch case to the bungalow. When they were in her room Mary Hopkins drew the curtain across the screened window, and brought the lamp close.

There was a key tied to a handle of each. She opened the trunk first. The contents were in disorder as though they had been hauled out hastily and searched. The few papers in the dispatch case were the same way. Someone had gone through the belongings of the dead man thoroughly, taken what was desired, and dumped the remainder back carelessly.

Her lips pressed tight together, Mary Hopkins looked at the open trunk. She had to bite them finally, even then could not keep the tears from squeezing through her tight-shut lids. But her weakness did not last long. She dried her eyes and her face set in the stony look that Gilbert had noticed. She tenderly folded the dead man's clothes back in the trunk and closed the lid. For a long time she sat and gazed thoughtfully into space.

Before retiring she went out on the veranda to look at the night. A white form rose up from the bottom of the steps and startled her. She recognized Ali.

"What are you doing there, Ali?" she asked. "Didn't Mr. Vega show you where to sleep for the night?"

"Tuan told me where to sleep," Ali replied softly.

"Where?"

"Before your door."

"Mr. Vega told you that?" she asked, surprised.

"No. Tuan Besar, the big master, Gilbert."

In the darkness Mary Hopkins flushed.

"I shall be all right, Ali," she said hurriedly. "Go with the other boys and spend the night."

"Tuan has ordered," Ali said firmly.

That was the last thing she thought of that night—the silent, white-clad watcher with his terrible kris—and the man who had ordered him to guard her door night and day. She slept soundly and without fear.

The next morning the launch went down-river, for the missionary needed it in his daily work. Mary Hopkins stood on the small landing, Ali behind her, and watched it dwindle and pass from sight around the

next bend. Vega had come down to see it off also. He turned to her and smiled broadly.

"Now we are alone," he said with heavy humor. "We will enjoy ourselves, not? You will come to like Manuel Vega, senhorita."

She took no notice, remarked absently: "I think I will walk around the plantation."

"Yes. I will show you everything," Vega said eagerly.

"Please don't bother. I want to be alone and try to get my mind settled."

"As you wish."

The unhealthy face of the Portuguese wore a disappointed scowl as she walked up the bank. And when his eyes rested on Ali's back the scowl grew blacker.

Dark-skinned, lean, Tamil coolies, wearing dirty-white loin clothes, were taking the little porcelain sap cups from the small spigots at the bottom angle of the lozenge-shaped scars which had been cut in the bearing trees early that morning. They emptied the sap in buckets, and the buckets when full into a clumsy big-wheeled tank cart drawn by a hump-backed bullock.

Ali explained that the cuts were made early and the sap ran until about ten o'clock, when the hot sun healed the wound. The liquid latex was hauled to the chemical house and certain chemicals added. Then it was taken to the smoke house and coagulated into rubber sheets, which were sent to Singapore and sold by the pound.

It was interesting, but presently Mary Hopkins walked on farther, to where the latest clearing had been done and the trees were too young to tap. Still farther the cleared part of the plantation ended and the virgin jungle rose in a living wall.

She looked at it with interest.

"Do you suppose we could walk in there, Ali?" she asked.

"There should be a path."

They walked along the edge of the jungle and presently did come to a path leading in. It was narrow, not too well worn, but Ali turned into it without hesitation.

The narrow path ran through a wall of shrubs, bushes, and underwood from which huge trees shot high up and spread out at the top. There were ferns, mosses, orchids on every side, and huge lianas, immense rope-like vines, ran from tree to tree, up and down and looped and bound the jungle into one vast tangle.

It was hot. Insects buzzed and bit. Mary Hopkins was quickly uncomfortable, but she followed on after Ali. Presently he stopped.

"You want go back?" he asked, showing white teeth in a smile.

"Do you suppose there is a creek ahead anywhere?"

"Allah knows. Perhaps."

"If there is I would like to see it."

Ali turned obediently and went on. But shortly he stopped again, and laid his hand on his kris hilt.

JACOBS was striding toward them. The man had seen them first. His thin lips were tight and there was a frank scowl on his face.

"What are you doing back here?" he rasped when he came up.

Ali shrugged.

Mary Hopkins answered easily: "Just taking a walk. I have heard so much about the jungle that I determined to see it before I went back home."

Jacobs stared at her as though to see whether she was speaking the truth. The scowl gradually left his face.

"Well, don't go any farther back," he said surlily. "Something might happen to you."

"Ali can take care of me."

The scowl returned.

"Ali be damned! He won't help you if a tiger gets after you. A report came this morning that tiger tracks were seen a couple of miles away. The beast might be around here now. Go back to the bungalow. That's the safest place."

At the mention of tiger Ali's eyes rolled.

"Tiger has much evil spirits," he declared.

Jacobs was blocking their way, showing no evidence of allowing them to pass. She gave in. "I'll go back," she said. "But your tiger doesn't worry me a bit."

"You'd better let him worry you," Jacobs retorted. Fancy, perhaps, but there seemed to be something more than warning in his voice, something kin to a threat.

He followed them into the open rows of young rubber trees, and on into the bearing groves. "Let's go and see what is down this way, Ali," Mary Hopkins finally said, and pointed to the upper end of the place.

Ali nodded, swung off in that direction obediently. She followed.

Jacobs watched them go, frowning. Then

shrugged and went on toward the bungalow.

Carelessly, almost indifferently, Mary Hopkins kept on, until she was sure they were out of sight of Jacobs and anyone in the vicinity of the bungalow. Then she said suddenly: "I would like to go back up the jungle path, Ali."

The lithe Malay looked uncomfortable.

"If there is tiger, it would be not wise," he ventured.

Mary smiled.

"There isn't any tiger, I am sure," she said.

"But Tuan said so. Perhaps. Very great evil if so. Tuan Besar would not like it."

She didn't know whether to be irritated or amused.

"Bother Mr. Gilbert," she said, half-smiling. "He hasn't anything to do with what I desire. I shall go alone."

"But the tiger!"

"Mr. Jacobs didn't have a gun. Would he be walking unarmed in the jungle if he thought there was a tiger near?"

Ali nodded thoughtfully.

"Of course if you are afraid—"

Ali drew himself up proudly and touched the hilt of his kris.

"I will lead the way," he said gravely.

So they went once more into the heavy jungle. Kept on this time beyond the point where Jacobs had met them. Shortly they came to the banks of a small stream flowing easily toward the river. It was bridged by a log.

Ali stopped and looked around.

"You want cross?" he questioned uneasily.

Silence had closed in about them. There was no breeze. Each leaf, frond, and branch hung motionless, and the heat pressed moistly about. Mary took a small handkerchief from the pocket of her skirt, dried the perspiration from her forehead, thrust the handkerchief back carelessly and looked about with indecision.

"There ought to be a path," she said, half to herself.

"Not so good patch across water," Ali said hopefully.

"On this side, I mean. A path going along the stream?"

Ali looked down at the ground. Walked back and forth scanning the vegetation at each side. Suddenly he grunted and pushed aside part of a thick bush. Back of the screening branches a small path started and led upstream.

"I want to see where it leads."

The ways and whims of white people were too much at times for Ali. He pushed through the branches, held them for her, and, when she was in, led the way along the path.

It was even narrower than the one they had just quitted, but had been kept well opened up. Some of the cutting looked very recent.

For less than a quarter of a mile it followed the general course of the stream, and at last turned into the bank again. At that point there was a small bar in the stream bed, laid bare by low water. The sand of the bar was marked with shoe prints and had been dug over, with a shovel. The earth at the sides of the banks had been dug away also, and there were marks of a shovel up and down the stream.

Ali eyed the scene. His eyes suddenly lighted with interest. He leaped lightly from the bank to the sand bar, stooped, scooped up a handful of sand, and examined it closely.

Then he turned to her and exclaimed excitedly, "timor—tin!"

Mary Hopkins was not startled. Indeed she took the matter quite calmly, only asking: "Are you sure there is tin present?"

Ali nodded violently, dropped the handful of sand, picked up another and thrust it out at her.

"Plenty tin!" he exclaimed. "Ali know! Tin here, then tin all around, everywhere!" He took in the surrounding jungle with a wide sweep of his bare right arm.

She looked at the small stream, the rank vegetation crushing everything in, and the tell-tale signs of discovery on the sand bar and stream banks. "Ali," she questioned, "is it worth much money?"

There was vast respect in Ali's voice as he waded over to the bank.

"The wealth of a sultan, nay two sultans," he stated. "Tin does not grow alone."

"Jacobs knows of this?"

Ali nodded.

"The tiger guards his kill," he declared. "Perhaps it is best we go from this place. Kuala Bharu is far from here—and these men are vastly evil."

Her face set hard and sad.

"Yes, Ali," she agreed, "they are evil.

Let us go back. Say no word of what we have seen."

Ali scrambled up the bank and started back along the narrow path. Mary Hopkins turned to follow him, and as she did so a scraping branch caught the handkerchief which protruded from the pocket of her sport skirt and dragged it forth. When the last sign of their presence had vanished the bit of cloth still hung there, mute evidence of their visit.

THEY got out of the jungle without meeting anyone. Ali suggested that it would be better to circle around and come in from the direction they had been heading for when they left Jacobs. They did so—and met Jacobs near the bungalow.

"You've been out a long time," he said abruptly.

She was cool.

"Is that so? Everything is so interesting that I've just been wandering around without thought of the time."

"I didn't see you," Jacobs declared bluntly. "I was walking down that way myself."

"The place is so big that it isn't hard to miss one."

Jacobs grunted.

"Tiffin will be ready shortly," he said. "You'd better come in and get ready. And this afternoon take a siesta. Stop walking around. It isn't good for you."

Once again there was the hint of threat in his tone. Mary Hopkins did not show by any sign that she noticed it.

They ate tiffin together, Jacobs, Vega and she. Vega talked expansively and said nothing of importance. She listened politely, tried to answer lightly, act as though there was nothing on her mind. Jacobs applied himself to the food, paid little or no attention to the talk, and when he was through excused himself and went off for his siesta.

Over a tall glass of ginger beer Vega tried to linger and bring the talk to a personal basis. She pleaded fatigue and he took his departure, visibly disappointed.

Mary Hopkins did not sleep that siesta hour. She lay on the cot which had been her brother's bed, and thought and thought. When the mid-day heat had cooled a trifle she bathed, changed into clean white clothes and went outside again, still thoughtful.

There was no sign of Jacobs or Vega. With Ali close behind her she walked down by the coolie line, and slowly back around to the chemical shack. She looked inside there for a moment and then went on aimlessly to the storehouse. It was built native style, bamboo side walls and thatched roof. As she neared the windowless back a voice came through the porous bamboo walls.

It was Jacobs', talking heatedly. She could not help but hear his words. "I tell you it don't pay to fool with the damn rubber! It's chicken feed alongside of what we've got in our hands. Let the coolies go."

Vega answered, his oily voice persuasive. "But the looks. It is better that we seem to raise rubber for a while. It will look better."

"Hell with looks!" Jacobs exclaimed impatiently. "You fixed everything legal, didn't you?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But what?"

"One never knows. The sister has appeared. Better we wait until she is back in England, and has forgotten about her brother's place."

"Send her away!" snapped Jacobs. "Why didn't you tell her there was no place to stay here? I caught her prowling back along the path today. Said she was looking about."

"Yes, perfectly natural, not? She comes to see and she does so. Forget her, my friend. Her face is pretty, but her head is empty inside. They are all so. Leave her to Manuel."

"Don't start your tricks again," said Jacobs impatiently. "There's too much on hand to run any risks."

Her cheeks flaming, Mary Hopkins moved away, and Vega's answer blended into a jumble of meaningless words.

DINNER that evening was uneventful. Jacobs said little, applied himself to his food in sour silence. Mary Hopkins only spoke when she was spoken to. Vega alone talked, expansively. But when his remarks fell flat for the greater part of the meal he finally slowed up.

Jacobs left as soon as the meal was over. Vega lingered on in his chair. His beady eyes rested on her calculatingly.

"You are so, so beautiful," he said suddenly, showing his teeth in what was meant to be a gallant smile.

It made no impression. Mary told him coolly: "So I've been told."

Vega drained his wine glass.

"I tell you, I think you are sweet girl. Las' night I have dream about you."

"I had a dream about you, also," Mary Hopkins told him on sudden impulse.

"Ah, you have dream about Manuel? You think about him, not? Explain to him what was in the dream." Vega hitched his chair nearer the corner of the table and leaned over toward her with eager anticipation.

She looked at him steadily and said slowly: "I dreamt that I saw you have a snake, a king cobra. You were carrying it."

Her words had a most unusual effect. Vega's pulpy features suddenly paled. He grasped the edge of the table with his fleshy hands, stared at her with widened eyes, and said with an effort: "A snake? A hamadryad?"

"Yes. You were carrying it."

Fear etched itself on the gross features of the Portuguese. He swallowed. A sudden tense silence fell between them. At last, with an effort he asked: "What did I do with this snake, senhorita?"

Satisfied, Mary lowered her eyes, smiled, and shook her head.

"I don't know. Dreams fade off that way, you know. At times it seems that I am going to remember what you did next, and I try, but it always slips away from me. Perhaps if I keep on trying it will come back."

Vega sat back up, poured a glassful of wine and gulped it.

"No," he said, shaking his head with determination. "Do not bother your pretty head about it, senhorita. That is meant for thoughts much nicer than the so, so slimy snake, not? I, Manuel, will give you fine thoughts to dream over. We will sit out on the veranda, not? There we watch the moon and I tell you so, so softly."

"Thank you. I don't care to sit out on the veranda."

"You do not like me, senhorita?"

She said nothing.

The man's little eyes flamed as they rested on her. He stood up and said a trifle thickly: "I am very good fellow, senhorita. You not know Manuel, that is all. Come, give me one kiss an' you will change those feeling." He stepped around the corner of the table.

Mary Hopkins sprang to her feet and slipped around the table away from him.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Vega," she declared coldly.

Vega laughed.

"No. I think of myself now," he said, and made a sudden move toward her, swift for all his apparent bulk.

She barely eluded the clutch of his extended fingers.

Without warning the front screen door burst open and Ali leaped into the room. His terrible, wavy-bladed kris was swinging in his right hand and his face was set. Two swift strides brought him across the room. The keen blade flickered through the air at Vega's head.

Mary cried out chokingly.

Vega dropped.

The blade swept harmlessly over his head. Before Ali could strike again Vega had scrambled under the table. The Malay drew his kris back to stab.

Mary Hopkins cried: "Ali! Stop! Let him alone!"

Ali hesitated.

"Stop!" she repeated, and ran around the edge of the table and caught at his arm. "You mustn't!" she gasped. "Don't k-kill him!"

"Better he is dead," Ali argued. "He is snake. I saw. Next time perhaps I not see. Snake strike deep then—and I cannot face Tuan Besar."

The strain she had been under, the sudden shock of events, the abrupt let down, had been too much for her nerves. She could not keep her voice steady.

"Th-there will be no next time, Ali. I am g-going back down the river in the morning. There is a boat here. They will have to send me."

Ali dropped his blade.

AT THAT moment the screen door again opened and Jacobs entered. He looked at Ali, the drawn kris, the shaken girl, and snapped:

"What's going on here? I heard a scream. What's the idea? Where's Vega?"

From under the table shaken tones issued.

"Take him outside!"

"Who?"

"The Malay!"

"Get out!" Jacobs ordered Ali.

Ali looked at Mary Hopkins inquiringly.

She nodded. "Wait outside the door," she requested.

Ali went silently, the kris still in his hand. When the door had closed behind him there was a scuffling under the table and the fat form of Vega crawled out and stood up, white-faced.

Jacobs glared at him.

"What's the idea of crawling under the table like a dog?" he demanded.

Vega began to curse wildly in Portuguese. Finally he broke into English to explain—"The —— tried to cut my head off! My pistol is not with me. I dropped under the table to live! I will shoot him like a dog!" And he resorted to Portuguese again to express his feelings.

Mary Hopkins had recovered some of her poise. She exclaimed determinedly: "You will not do a thing to Ali. You brought it on yourself by trying to seize me."

"Up to your old tricks again!" Jacobs snarled at Vega. "You fool! You brainless fool!"

"It was just a so, so little kiss I wanted," Vega retorted sulkily.

"Just a little kiss! And for that you'd risk—" Jacobs suddenly broke off his flow of furious speech and ended up explosively: "You fool!"

"I've had enough. I am going down river tomorrow morning," Mary Hopkins declared. "I shall have to ask for your motor boat."

"A good idea," Jacobs growled. "This isn't any place for a woman. You made a mistake to come up in the first place. I'll see that the boat is ready all right." To Vega he said shortly, "Come on out of here. You've done enough for one evening."

Vega, though much larger than his cruel-lipped partner, evidently respected him. He muttered under his breath, scowled at Mary Hopkins, and followed. Ali was standing outside the door with his drawn blade. Vega stepped hastily past him and hurried down the front steps. The night swallowed the two men.

MARY HOPKINS slept little that night. Fear of Vega was not at the bottom of it. The silent figure of Ali, dozing in front of her door was reassurance against that. But her thoughts were racing, weaving, seeking to piece a definite plan out of the information she had collected. She had come to the plantation, driven by knowledge that she possessed, and intuition. The intuition was now certainty. But the incident with Vega the night before had driven home the fact that after all she was but a woman, ten hours from all law.

She finally decided to take everything to Ali's Tuan Besar, his big master, Mr. Gilbert. With that she slept.

The first thing in the morning she got Ali to take her brother's trunk and dispatch case to the rear of the clearing, where there was a trash pile. There she burned everything, remaining until the last shred of cloth and bit of paper was consumed and the wooden sides and bottom of the air-tight trunk were burned out. Just before leaving she noticed Jacobs walking in the direction of the jungle. She paid him no attention, went to her room, locked her bags, and ate.

Ali reported that the boat was ready. He took the bags. She followed him. The launch, a little smaller than the missionary's, was waiting by the small landing. Vega was standing there, a rifle resting butt-down before him. He kept a sharp watch on Ali.

Jacobs had not returned from the jungle. Evidently he did not wish to see her off. She took her seat in the launch.

A thin Chinaman and a Malay made up the crew of the boat. Ali sat behind her, under the awning which covered most of the middle part of the boat, and gave no heed to the crew.

Vega spoke to the Chinaman curtly. The man nodded, stepped ashore, untied the painter which held their stern to the dock against the push of the current, and then stepped back in the boat and kept it from drifting away by reaching out and holding on to the edge of the landing.

Vega gave him more directions.

Their last minute of contact with the plantation arrived, and at that moment the hurrying form of Jacobs appeared at the top of the bank.

"Hold that boat!" he shouted.

Vega snapped an order. The Chinaman held the straining boat closer to the landing.

Jacobs had been running, and was panting when he stopped on the landing. He pushed his sun helmet to the back of his head, glared down in the boat at Mary Hopkins and demanded: "Why did you slip back in the jungle yesterday, after I warned you not to?"

She answered: "You told me there was a

tiger around—but I also told you that I didn't care about that. I wanted to go—and I did."

"Yes," Jacobs grated. "Spying behind my back!"

"What?"

"Spying! I found your handkerchief on the stream bank where I've been working."

"Yes. I found a path and followed it."

"You couldn't find that path! You searched! You came here to spy!"

"What for?"

"To—to trick us!"

Mary flushed angrily. Then, because she was almost away from them, she spoke her mind recklessly and bluffed.

"I did come here to watch you. Why shouldn't I—you murdered my brother? I wanted evidence, and I have it."

Vega paled and his ungainly figure seemed to shrink. Jacobs tensed. Then reason returned to him and he snapped: "Prove it! We'll go down-river with you and face your evidence in court. John Hopkins was bitten by a cobra."

"It was put into his room to bite him."

"Prove it!" Vega blustered.

"In good time. Meanwhile I'm going to take the plantation away from you."

Vega laughed. But Jacobs became icy cool.

"How?" he demanded.

Without thinking, she carried her bluff on through.

"My brother paid what he owed. I knew that all along—for I sent him the money from England to do it."

"Your proof!" Jacobs rasped.

"There was a receipt. You couldn't find it when you went through his things. But there was a false bottom in his trunk—and there he had a memorandum telling where the receipt and his other valuables were hidden. He always told me that when he died I was to look in the bottom of his trunk. I did—and now I can take the plantation back. I promise you his murderer will be punished."

Jacobs stared at her for a long moment. Then he suddenly wheeled on Vega and raged:

"I knew you would mess things up someway! You fool! You blundered! You swore there was no way to lose. Why didn't you burn the damn trunk?"

"How could I know about the bottom? It was not even known he had a sister! I like not the way you talk!"

"Like, hell! What do I care what you like! First you let the trap exist—then you act like a fool and let the sister come here and spring the trap. Pretty face—empty head! Leave her to Manuel! You—whose name is known everywhere for trickery. You—you soft-headed fool! You've been tricked yourself this time and you may hang for it!"

MARY HOPKINS had been listening eagerly to their words. Caution came to her with a rush. She turned and spoke a few low words to Ali. He hissed an order to the Chinaman, drew his kris and thrust the point against the man's side.

Obediently the Chinaman let go of the landing. Ali reached out and pushed. The launch moved slightly, the current caught it, and a gap quickly grew between the side and the landing.

Jacobs' back was to them. His tirade had diverted Vega's attention. But when there was fully six feet of water between the landing and the departing boat Vega noticed it. He pointed.

Jacobs wheeled, saw and shouted: "Bring that boat back here!"

Mary Hopkins spoke to Ali again. He ordered the Chinaman to start the motor. The man hesitated. Ali dug the sharp point of the kris in his side. He bent over the motor.

"Come back!" Jacobs ordered again.

They were a score of feet away and drifting faster every second. Under Ali's prodding kris the Chinaman worked feverishly at the motor.

Jacobs suddenly snatched the rifle from Vega's hands, brought it to aim and shouted: "Bring that boat back or I'll shoot!"

The Chinaman caught sight of the rifle and ducked. Ali gouged him with the kris. The Celestial squealed and bent to his task again.

Jacobs fired.

Ali staggered. Caught his balance with an effort. Clenched his lips tightly. A dark circle appeared on the right side of his shirt. With an effort he raised his arm and prodded the Chinaman again.

Jacobs fired a second time.

The bullet struck Ali in the head. He

uttered no sound. The kris slipped from his fingers and clattered on the bottom of the boat. He collapsed slowly backward, over the side of the boat and dropped into the dark water with a splash. Ripples moved away from the spot, the water closed over the slight swirl and Mary Hopkins was alone with the Chinaman and his mate. There was nothing she could do. She sat still, numb at Ali's sudden death and the turn events had taken. The two men lost no time in getting the motor started, swinging the launch around and bringing it once more to the side of the landing. The Malay picked Ali's kris up and thrust it into his belt by his own kris, a poorer one obviously.

"Get out!" Jacobs commanded roughly.

Slowly she stood up, stepped over the side, and once more was on the landing.

If the Portuguese had more cunning than his partner, he possessed less courage. His face was pasty as he stared at her. He wet his lips with the end of his tongue and then said in a shaken voice to Jacobs—

"You killed him! She saw it! You will hang!"

"So will you if she gets down-river with her information and her proof that we stole the plantation," Jacobs retorted brutally.

Vega looked around fearfully, as though the law was even then closing in on him. "What you think, what we had better do?" he asked. "Tie her up and run?"

Jacobs snorted contemptuously.

"Run? You fool! Do you think I'd have killed the Malay to keep a rope away from your neck? You'd hang—not me! I wasn't within a hundred miles of here when her brother died! Blast your fat hide, no! But I've got my fingers into the richest thing I've heard of since I've been out in this bloody part of the world! I'm going to keep them there and go home a millionaire! We've got title and we're going to keep it!" The cruel, thin lips tightened, the mask of a face set with grim purpose.

Vega stared at the shorter man in fascination.

"What—what you think to do?"

"Do?" What is there to do, you fool! Haven't you got sense enough to figure that out?"

Vega shuddered slightly.

"I like not this, this killing business. It is like pig sticking. The number grows. One, perhaps—a little so, so accident, is all right. But two, three, four, maybe five, no! I tell you, I like it not!"

"You'll like getting your neck stretched less! I've seen 'em! After you hang a while your neck goes like rubber! You can wear a high collar then! He chuckled mirthlessly.

Vega shuddered again and his face paled even more.

"What you think to do?" he asked again, with an effort.

"Find out where that damned receipt is, you gave to Hopkins when he paid you, and then couldn't find after he was dead!"

"And then—?"

"And then we'll wipe the page clean! Easy for the crocs to get 'em if a boat should happen to turn over."

Mary Hopkins could not believe her ears. No man could talk so calmly of murder. Then she realized that her brother had died, Ali had just been killed—that she was only a girl—ten full hours away from any help. Black despair began to close in about her.

"Get on up to the bungalow!" Jacobs ordered her roughly. "You, Vega, turn one of those native dugouts over and start it drifting downstream."

She looked wildly around. Vast areas of thick jungle mile on mile in every direction, an indifferent Malay, a mask-faced Chinaman, the gross Portuguese with one murder to his credit and fear of the gallows driving him on, and Jacobs, cruel-lipped, ruthless. No help—no hope.

"Hurry up!" Jacobs snapped. "And don't try to scream or make any fuss! There's no one to hear you."

He was right. There was nothing to do but obey. She started slowly up the bank. Jacobs came after, the rifle ready. Vega remained behind to set a dugout afloat, bottom side up.

JACOBS took her to the bungalow and locked her in the bedroom she had occupied.

"Don't try to break out and run away," he called curtly through the door. "I'll be watching and I'll shoot you on sight."

He went out on the veranda.

There Vega joined him. They talked in low tones. Through the thin walls Mary Hopkins could hear the drone of their voices. At times Jacobs' tones rose impatiently, but no words were distinguishable. Then one of them went away and one

remained to guard. She could hear the creak of the chair as he shifted in it.

They left her there until after the siesta hour in the afternoon. Jacobs was the cause of it—and there was method in his delay. It allowed fear to work on her mind. She got no tiffin or water to drink. As the hot afternoon hours wore on she began to feel faint and weak. She knocked on the door and asked for water, but received no reply. Finally she laid back on the bed and relaxed in silent misery.

At last the front screen opened and steps came across the main room of the bungalow and stopped at her door. A key grated in the lock.

Mary Hopkins got to her feet quickly, fighting down the feeling of panic that swept over her.

The door opened. Jacobs stepped into the room, closed it behind him, and stared at her.

"I have come for the receipt that Vega gave your brother," he said quietly. His tones were low, yet there was an undercurrent of deliberate menace in them that sent a cold feeling through her.

She did not know. She had taken a long chance and put a bluff across. Now it was working against her. To save her life she could not call the lost receipt from the place her brother had hidden it. She answered with the truth.

"I don't know where it is."

He took a step forward, said warningly: "I won't leave until I know. You might as well tell me at once. I'll get it from you finally."

She looked at his sharp features, his thin bloodless lips, his eyes. She had not really noticed his eyes before. They stared out of his mask of a face feverishly. An indication of the desperate purpose burning within him, those eyes. She watched them in fascination.

Jacobs took another step forward.

"The receipt," he said through his teeth.

The faint feeling started by a lack of food grew on her. Waves of giddiness began to radiate from her stomach. She shook her head silently and took another step back from him.

Jacobs slipped his right hand into his pocket and brought forth a small penknife. With deliberate slowness he opened it, never taking his burning eyes from her. When the naked blade was exposed he again came toward her.

The silent advance, the grim purpose in the man's face, the small blade of steel he held ready, and the knowledge that she was utterly at his mercy, swept down on the helpless girl like a great weight. She retreated until her back was against the wall. And, when he came on, the waves of giddiness welled up and enveloped her. Her knees buckled and she sank to the floor in a faint.

Jacobs swore out loud. He snapped the knife shut, stepped to her, lifted her with an effort and dumped her on the bed.

"Bring me some water!" he called to Vega.

In a moment Vega entered with a pitcher. He stopped inside the door and stared at the limp form huddled on the bed.

"What is?" he asked. "You have killed her?"

"Fainted," Jacobs answered briefly. "Give me the water."

Vega stepped to the side of the bed and handed the pitcher over. His little beady eyes were riveted on the helpless form of the girl.

"She is so, so pretty," he breathed. "Better we should keep her a little before she dies, eh?" He moistened his lips with the end of his tongue and grinned.

Jacobs cursed him.

"Get out! You started all this with your damn foolishness about women! There'll be no more of it! I want a tin mine—not a girl! Time enough for that when I get a million!"

Vega went out sullenly.

Jacobs sprinkled water on her face. When that had no effect he poured it, finally dashing the last at her. It failed to revive her. He stepped out and filled the pitcher again.

This time she came to. Her eyes opened; she stirred, stared up at the ceiling. Jacobs set the pitcher on a stand on the corner, came back and stood waiting for her to recover fully.

A NATIVE voice spoke to Vega outside. Then Vega called in excitedly: "A boat she come up the river!"

Jacobs went out hastily. The native had come up from the river bank with the news. Jacobs ordered Vega to watch the girl, and dashed down and verified the news himself.

A small launch had rounded the bend a half mile below and was plowing up against the current.

The man's face twisted with anger when he saw it. He ran for the bungalow, swearing as he went. The next five minutes were feverish ones. Jacobs took cord, bound Mary Hopkins hand and foot, and gagged her with a towel. He and Vega thrust pistols in their pockets. Then Jacobs went down to the landing to meet the launch, leaving Vega locked in the room guarding the helpless girl.

She had gathered from their excited speech that a boat was coming. Hope flamed in her breast. It changed to fear when Vega locked himself in the room with her.

But there was no need for fear at the time. The fat Portuguese was frightened. His face was pasty. He sat on a chair with his pistol in his hand and stared at the door fearfully.

They heard the faint sound of the motor coming nearer. It stilled and they knew it was at the landing. Some time passed. Then feet trod the front steps, crossed the veranda and entered the large main room of the bungalow.

Jacobs spoke.

"Have a drink."

Another answered.

Mary Hopkins' heart gave a wild leap. It was Ali's Tuan Besar that was speaking, Gilbert.

"Thanks," Gilbert said shortly. "I didn't come to drink. I came to see Miss Hopkins."

Vega's pistol hand trembled. He swallowed.

"I told you she is not here," Jacobs replied smoothly. "She made up her mind to leave at once. The motor boat was not working at the time and the Malay who was with her said they could float down all right in a native dugout. I let them have one and they started off. That's all I know. You should have met them."

A moment's silence.

"We did pass a dugout, floating bottom up," Gilbert muttered.

"It must have been the one," Jacobs said with conviction in his voice. "Perhaps it tipped them out and they made for the shore. You'll probably find them on your way down."

"They would have hailed me on the way up if they had been along the shore," Gilbert argued.

"Perhaps they had cut back in the jungle to find a path. And they might have drowned. The river is full of crocodiles, you know. All I can say is that Vega and I started them off this morning."

"Where is Vega."

Jacobs must have remembered.

"Out shooting pigeons," he said cheerfully. "He'll be along before dark."

A slight bit of courage had returned to Vega. At the mention of pigeon shooting he looked at Mary Hopkins and grinned slightly.

She lay taut, despair beginning to pull its shroud over her again.

"Why did you send her in a small dugout?" Gilbert asked angrily. "You knew something like that could happen!"

"What was I to do? She insisted on going."

"Ali should have known better," Gilbert declared heavily.

Help on the other side of the thin door—and she could make no sign. It was maddening. Mary Hopkins struggled, tried to make some sound through the heavy gag that covered her mouth.

Vega was on his feet like a cat, his heavy moist hand clutching her throat, choking off all breath and sound.

Then the front door opened and the two men went out on the veranda again. Their voices were fainter but understandable.

"You will stay all night?" Jacobs invited.

That seemed to settle the last of Gilbert's doubts.

"No. I'm going back down river. I can cover a good bit of water before darkness. If they are on the bank I want to pick them up."

"I'm sorry about it. But I don't see anything else I could have done. She would have her own way. There's the Malay boy who held the boat for them. He'll tell you they insisted on going—and did leave." Jacobs raised his voice and called.

The Malay must have been near. Jacobs addressed him in a moment.

"Mem-sahib and her man went to Kuala Bahru early, did they not?"

The man answered—"Yes, Tuan."

"There you are," Jacobs said with satisfaction.

GILBERT did not answer the remarks. But said: "That's a fine kris the man is wearing. I'd like to look at it closer."

"Here it is—help yourself," Jacobs said.

Suddenly Gilbert spoke sharply. "I thought so! This is Ali's kris."

"It can't be! It belongs to this man! Your man wore his kris away! I saw it!"

"You lie!" Gilbert snapped. "This is Ali's! His mark is on the blade! He never left the place alive, without his kris! I know—drop that gun, Jacobs, or I'll shoot you!"

A heavy object clattered on the floor of the veranda.

Vega, who had been growing more and more triumphant, paled again.

From the veranda Gilbert spoke heatedly.

"You've been lying from the first! Miss Hopkins and Ali are here! I'm going to search the place until I find them!"

"I forbid you to enter a building," Jacobs replied furiously.

"Keep your hands up! Turn your back! Order that man of yours away! If he tries to get his mates to rush me I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Gilbert's loud words were plain in the room. Vega was livid with fright. He stared at the bound girl. A thought sent him to the bed. Panting, he lifted her, let her down on the floor and pushed her far back under the bed. He pulled the top sheet over so that it hung down to the floor and acted as a curtain, hiding what was under the bed.

Gilbert stamped into the large front room of the bungalow.

"Stand over there!" he ordered Jacobs. "Don't move! I'm going to look through this place first!"

Followed the sound of a door opening. Then another. Gilbert came to the bedroom. The door was locked.

"Where is the key to this room?" he demanded.

"Vega has it. You can't get in there!"

"I think so!"

The next instant Gilbert's stout shoulder crashed heavily against the thin door. It splintered, swung in. He followed, his pistol covering the room.

Vega had backed up against the far wall. He also held his pistol ready—but when he looked into the muzzle of Gilbert's he raised both hands high.

"Don't shoot!" he implored.

"Toss your gun on the bed!"

Vega did so.

Gilbert looked about the room. Nothing was visible but the Portuguese.

"What are you doing in here?" Gilbert demanded.

Vega shrugged.

"I started to shoot pigeons—but I feel bad and slip in here and lie down. I thought you were robber."

"I think you are blackguard!" Gilbert mimicked. "Where is Miss Hopkins?"

Vega shrugged again, kept his eyes away from the bed.

"How should I know? She started down river this morning."

"Don't you start lying! Where is she?"

"I speak true. Look everywhere. Smoke house—coolie line—everywhere!"

"I'm going to! Get in the other room and join your partner!"

Vega lurched hastily across the room. Gilbert started to follow him.

Mary Hopkins had heard everything as she lay under the bed. Hope had rushed back again. Suddenly it began to recede. If Gilbert got out of the room and away she would probably never see him again. She tried to scream. Could not, and thought of rolling. She did so, awkwardly. Just as Gilbert started out of the room her bound feet pushed from under the edge of the sheet.

He saw them, stopped short, exclaimed: "What's this?" Then he dropped on his knees and threw the sheet back.

Jacobs, his eyes blazing with passion, had watched everything through the door. When Gilbert's attention went to Mary Hopkins he acted. There was a heavy pottery vase on the table. Jacobs had the vase by the neck and was through the bedroom door in a silent, swift rush. Gilbert, intent for the moment on Mary Hopkins, was caught unawares. The vase broke on his head; he slumped unconscious.

Vega stood in the doorway, not yet over his fright.

"Another," he muttered. "They come so, so fast, all time."

Jacobs made sure Gilbert was unconscious, then straightened up and snarled—"Shut up! Get some cord! We'll have to tie him and go down and fix his boat crew!

If one of them gets away we might as well go in and give up!"

"More? I tell you, I like it not!"

"Get the cord!" Jacobs' tones were so venomous that Vega went hastily.

Jacobs secured Gilbert's feet, tied his hands behind him, stood up and said briefly: "Come on—they'll be all right until we can get back to them!" The two left the bungalow.

MARY HOPKINS had been half under the bed when Gilbert was knocked out. She stayed that way until he was tied and the two partners left the room. Then she inched the rest of the way out and managed to sit up and look at Gilbert.

She was frightened when she saw a nasty wound in his scalp from which the blood streamed freely. It looked as though the skull might have caved in. But it was not. Gilbert came to his senses right after that. The first thing he saw was her eyes, fixed intently on him.

It made everything lucid. He tried to reach out, found that he was bound, and managed to struggle to a sitting posture. He grinned wryly at her.

"I don't know what happened," he said. "But it was my fault. I let them put something over on me just when I found you."

She could not answer through the gag; shook her head instead.

"Lie down behind me so I can reach that bloody towel with my fingers," Gilbert urged. "I think I can pull it down."

She obeyed him. After several futile attempts he managed to get the ends of his fingers under the edge of the towel and worked at it until it slipped down and allowed her to speak.

"Thank you," she gasped when she was upright once more.

"Did they hurt you?" He asked it fiercely.

She colored under what she read in his voice. Shook her head.

"Not yet."

"Not yet? What are those two rascals up to?"

She told him quickly.

"My brother borrowed from them; sweated blood to keep his land when rubber slumped. Then, early this year he found traces of tin on some of his land that had not been cleared."

Gilbert sat up straighter.

"Tin?" he echoed with a trace of excitement.

"Yes. He said nothing about it to anyone. You see, the land was not his entirely. He had given this Vega and his partner a claim on it until they were paid, and he was afraid they would find some way to get it from him if they suspected there was a fortune under the soil."

"I should jolly well think they would try," Gilbert murmured.

"Then they did find out. John caught Vega inspecting the tin sands.

"I had a little money—my share of our father's estate. John put his in this land; I invested mine. John cabled, explained how things were, and asked me to put my money in with his and come out and live with him. Before, when he needed it so badly, he would not ask for it might be lost. But the tin made a fortune certain. I knew it was true if John said so and I converted my investments into cash and sent it. Shortly after, I followed.

"Then—you told me John was dead—and this Vega and his partner had the plantation. I knew that he had paid them off, and they must have killed him to get the land. I came here to see what I could do. When I was ready to go this morning I foolishly told them what I knew and suspected. Jacobs shot Ali and tied me up. If you had not come—I d-don't know what would have happened. Jacobs had a knife—" She shuddered at the thought.

"Shot Ali! Tied you up!" Gilbert was furious. "The swine!" he grated, "I'll see that they measure up for that!"

"I th-think they mean to kill us also. Jacobs said he was going to become a millionaire if he had to kill everyone who tried to stop him. They've gone down to put your men out of the way now—so they can't go down to Kuala Bharu and talk."

Even as she spoke a shot rang out down on the river bank. Shouts, cries, sounded.

"The bloody murderers!" Gilbert raged. "Killing my men off!" Then, with an effort he became cool. "They'll kill us all right, if they can! We've got to get out of here!"

"How can we do that?"

"Come over with your back to me. There's a small knife in my right trousers pocket. See if you can get it out."

She wriggled into the awkward position. On the fourth attempt she got the small knife out. Gilbert turned his back to her, caught it in his fingers, and after much fumbling, got the blade open. It was easy then to saw the cords around her wrists in two. She took the knife, cut her feet loose, and then freed him.

There had been one more shot. The cries on the river bank stopped.

"I brought two men with me!" Gilbert said tensely.

Mary Hopkins rubbed her wrists, where the cords had pressed deep, and asked: "What shall we do?"

"They took my gun!"

"You were right," she told him wretchedly. "It's all my fault. If I had listened to you this wouldn't have happened."

"Hush. I would have done the same thing you did."

"You came—"

"I had to! I saw my men, told them I had important business up-river, and hurried. You see, I knew Vega and Jacobs."

"They are fiends!"

"Yes. We can't let them catch us here!"

GILBERT glanced around the room, then went to the window. "If we go out the front door they'll probably see us," he said. "We'll have to go this way."

The window was covered with screen wire. With a half dozen kicks Gilbert knocked the lower part of the wire loose. His shoulder cleared the rest of the frame.

He looked out. That side of the house was away from the coolie line and the smoke house. There was no one in sight. Neither could it have been seen from the river's edge.

Gilbert straddled the sill and dropped easily to the ground. Mary Hopkins followed. He caught her in his arms, set her down. For an instant, despite their haste, he held her close. She did not draw away.

Gilbert kissed her cheek once, fiercely.

"In case we don't come through," he said huskily.

He released her abruptly, went cautiously to the front corner of the house and looked down toward the landing. What he saw sent him back hurriedly.

"They're coming back to the house!" he burst out. "We've got to get away!"

"Where?"

The bit of cover the side of the house afforded them was all the place offered. If they went toward the rear of the clearing they would be seen by some of the Tamils. If they went out in front, even a few feet away from the side of the house they would be in sight of Vega and Jacobs. And Jacobs carried his rifle. He could stand off and shoot them down before they had done a score of yards.

Gilbert looked around desperately.

"Under the house!" he decided. "That's the only place!"

The bungalow was raised some two feet off the ground. John Hopkins had planted vines all around the house. Under the house, all was dim and shadowy.

Gilbert went near the back; parted the vines and held them while Mary Hopkins crawled through. He followed, and pulled the thick vines back in place.

It was dirty under there. Mary Hopkins suppressed a cry as a lizard scuttled across her hand. They could hear other small noises as the occupants of that space were disturbed.

"Get over near the center and lie flat on the ground," Gilbert whispered.

She did so. He joined her. They lay there motionless.

They could hear the two men plainly as they came up to the bungalow. Vega grumbled.

"It is terrible. Not one, not t'ree—but many! More all the time! Me, I would rather stay poor. I will not sleep."

Jacobs said savagely: "You'll not live if you keep spilling that kind of talk! You'll hang if one of them gets away—and I'll shoot you if you try to block my game! You're in it now—carry through!"

The feet trod on the steps, across the veranda, and then sounded plain on the floor overhead.

They stopped. Jacobs suddenly swore loudly.

"They're gone! Look at the window! They went out that way!"

His feet pounded across the floor to the window.

Vega's heavier tread followed.

"Dios!" the Portuguese wailed. "I knew it! Now we will both hang!"

"Stop it!" Jacobs ordered frantically. "They've made for the jungle! They can't be far! Let's get after them! They haven't any guns!"

He clambered out the window and

dropped to the ground. Vega followed.

Gilbert reached out in the gloom, found Mary Hopkins' hand, and pressed it tightly. The end had come for them both if Jacobs and Vega looked under the house and found them.

The vines were too thick to see out, but the voices sounded loud and clear.

"They couldn't have got to the river bank!" Jacobs snarled. "They went back toward the jungle!"

"Perhaps they are hiding in the smoke house, or with the coolies!"

"We'll search them all! Come on—and shoot if you see them!" Their steps hastened away.

Gilbert and Mary Hopkins lay tense. At last Gilbert emitted a sigh of relief and whispered: "We'll have to get out of here! One of the dogs from the coolie line is liable to smell us and start barking. If we can get to my launch and get it started down river we'll be safe. Do you want to try it?"

"Anything you think is best!"

"We'll do that then! Slip up to the front! I'll look out the back and when they are out of sight I'll give the word. Run down to the landing as fast as you can and get in my launch! I'll follow!"

She crouched behind the vines which grew along the front of the veranda. He parted the growth at the back and peered out. In a few minutes he called softly—

"Run now! They just went into the smoke house!"

She emerged by the front steps, stood up, and ran for the landing. Gilbert scrambled after her.

The river bank hid the boats from the smoke house. Mary Hopkins reached Gilbert's launch unobserved. Gilbert raced after her. As he passed over the crest of the bank the bungalow stopped shielding him. Vega, stepping out of the smoke house door, saw his shoulders and head disappearing in the direction of the landing.

GILBERT was unaware that he had been seen. But he moved as fast as he could nevertheless. As he dashed down the bank he took his knife out and opened the blade.

His launch and the plantation launch were tied with their bows upstream. The plantation launch was at the lower end of the landing.

Gilbert ran to it first, slashed the painter, and pushed it adrift. Then he cut his own boat loose, stepped in and pushed out. The current caught both launches and carried them downstream.

Gilbert cranked his motor. It caught, spluttered, and stopped.

Both launches drifted steadily on.

Jacobs appeared on the bank, carrying his rifle. He ran down to the landing. Vega followed, more slowly.

This time there was no demand to stop. Jacobs halted on the landing, aimed, and shot.

The bullet cut through the awning over their heads.

"Lie down in the bottom of the boat!" Gilbert ordered Mary Hopkins.

She did.

Gilbert worked at the engine furiously.

Jacobs shot again. The bullet knocked a shower of splinters from the rail. One cut Gilbert's cheek. He paid no attention to it. Cranked at the motor desperately.

The launch was drifting farther away every second.

Jacobs aimed a long time for the third shot. It barked out. Gilbert had been crouching over the motor. The bullet struck his right arm below the elbow and broke the bone. He staggered, groaned, and clutched his useless arm.

Mary Hopkins got to her feet when she saw him stagger.

Before she could do anything Jacobs fired the fourth time. The bullet creased Gilbert's scalp. He toppled forward over the motor.

Jacobs gave a yell of triumph and shouted to Vega.

Mary Hopkins was not crying—but her heart was breaking. She tried to get Gilbert off the motor. He was heavy; she could hardly move him.

Vega and Jacobs had dashed on shore. Below the landing several small native dugouts were drawn up half out of the water. Vega scrambled into the bow of one. Jacobs pushed out and leaped into the stern.

There were two curved paddles in the boat. Each took one and began to paddle madly toward the launch.

Mary Hopkins finally got the limp form of Gilbert back off the motor. The effort left her breathless. Gasping, she seized the crank and turned.

The dugout pushed swiftly through the water toward the drifting launch.

Mary Hopkins uttered a wild silent prayer. She spun the crank as best she could.

The dugout was not more than a score of feet away.

The motor spit, backfired, began to hum steadily. The propeller lashed the water. The launch hesitated, began to move through the water. Mary Hopkins rushed up forward to the small steering wheel.

Jacobs cursed wildly at Vega. They redoubled their efforts. The dugout approached rapidly.

The launch gathered headway, swept out toward the middle of the river. The dugout held even. Then began to fall behind.

Jacobs suddenly dropped his paddle. seized his rifle, sprang to his feet and aimed at the girl.

His move rocked the craft.

Vega felt it. He looked over his shoulder. Saw Jacobs about to shoot. He threw his heavy bulk sideways out of range. The tricky little craft rolled clear over. The shot from the rifle went wild as the two men fell into the water.

Mary Hopkins looked around when the rifle went off. She saw what had happened. Saw Vega come up and flounder wildly. Saw Jacobs trying to swim clumsily to the dugout, which had drifted away.

It was plain that Vega could not swim, and Jacobs very little. They both would probably drown. She watched them tensely. Then, hardly knowing what she did, save that two humans could not drown before her eyes, she brought the launch around in a sharp circle and headed it back toward the struggling pair.

Vega gave a wild cry. His arms went up. His body was suddenly dragged under.

Jacobs heard the cry. Lashed the water frantically in an effort to get to the overturned dugout.

The launch bore down on him swiftly.

He screamed shrilly. A second scream was smothered as the dark water closed over his head. There was a swirl. A great scaly tail broke the surface of the water and disappeared.

The launch plowed over the spot.

Once more the river flowed serenely and there was but two launches and an overturned dugout on its surface.

MARY HOPKINS got the motor shut off. And then the tears came. She couldn't stop them, didn't try as she knelt by Gilbert's limp form. His broken arm was covered with blood. His head had two wounds and the thick red fluid had streaked down over his forehead. But his heart was still beating.

That went a long way toward stopping the wracking sobs. She managed to slip his belt off and make a tourniquet above the elbow with it.

She was holding it with one hand, and wiping the blood from his forehead with her handkerchief, when he came out of the blackness into which the grazing bullet had sent him.

He struggled up and sat on the seat by her, wincing as the pain shot through his broken arm.

"What happened?" he asked weakly.

She told him.

"The crocodiles got them," he said slowly. "Then they can't threaten you any more—thank God."

He was on her right, and he put his good left arm about her and drew her close.

The launch drifted on.

They were almost down to the bend before either noticed.

"We'll have to get the motor started, pick the other launch up and get back to the plantation," he said a trifle sheepishly.

"Yes—your arm," she agreed, suddenly remembering.

Gilbert winced as the pain darted through it. Then he tightened the arm that was about her.

"Yes, my arm," he agreed cheerfully.

She snuggled closer.

The launch drifted on.